

THE DIALECTICAL METHOD *

ERNST BLOCH

(Translated by John Lamb)

Introduction to Ernst Bloch's "The Dialectical Method"

On the occasion of Ernst Bloch's 90th birthday in summer 1975, he was celebrated in Germany as "one of the most important philosophers of our epoch."¹ Yet Bloch's work is relatively unknown in the English-speaking world. Although several collections of his writings were translated during the last years of his life, his main works have not appeared in English.² This is unfortunate for there are few bodies of twentieth century thought as complex, fascinating, and challenging as the writings of Ernst Bloch.

Bloch's philosophy is grounded in a philosophical vision of an emancipated humanity and is described by himself as a "philosophy of Hope." Following the young Marx, Bloch sees the human being as a species-being, containing as yet unsatisfied needs and unrealized potentialities which he posits as the motors of human self-activity. Art, philosophy, and religion are the repository of needs and potentialities struggling for expression, hence they give us clues as to what the human being is and can be. Bloch's work is a magnificent project of decoding our cultural heritage to restore to us our human potential. His concept of the "not-yet" militates against the notion of an innate, ahistorical human essence, for our species has not-yet become what it can be and thus has not yet realized its humanity.

Bloch also calls his work a "philosophy of the future" which depicts "what is not, building into the blue that lines all edges of the world: this is why we build ourselves into the blue and search for truth and

* "The Dialectical Method" was published as Chapter Nine of Ernst Bloch's *Subject–Object. Erläuterungen zu Hegel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1962; slightly enlarged version of 1951 publication).

reality where mere facticity vanishes – *incipit vita nova*.³ For Bloch, the task of philosophy is to interpret “what is not-yet-realized and to change the world in accordance with what could be. Bloch calls the ontological foundation of his theory “Left-Aristotelianism.”⁴ Aristotle’s concept of matter as activity and potentiality suggests an ontological priority of possibility over actuality and necessity. Bloch follows this interpretation of Aristotle in his own thought which conceives of reality as a dynamic process latent with possibility directed toward the realization of its potentialities which provide its *telos* and *entelechia*. But all is not fullness and ripeness in this metaphysical scenario, for the not-yet is permeated with a constitutive not: “The not is the lack of something and the flight from this lack; hence, it drives toward that which is lacking. With the not, drives are modeled in the living being: as drive, need, striving, and primarily as hunger.”⁵ For Bloch, hunger is an ontological category and in his theory humans are primarily needy, hungering beings driven to fill lacks and a multiplicity of hungers.

Subjekt–Objekt. Erläuterungen zu Hegel is at once one of the best studies of Hegel and one of the best introductions to Bloch’s philosophy. It was written during his exile in America in the 1940’s, was completed in the German Democratic Republic after World War II and was published in 1951.⁶ Bloch has appropriated Hegel’s thought into his own philosophy and what he sees as the spirit and truth of Hegel is alive in all of his own writings. *Subjekt–Objekt* makes clear Bloch’s debt to Hegel and the Hegelian roots of his thought. Yet it also contains brilliant interpretations of Hegel. The text begins with remarks on Hegel’s language, mode of thought, and basic ideas, and then interrogates Hegel’s major works from the early writings to the *History of Philosophy*. The third part analyzes Hegel’s relation to Kierkegaard, Schelling, Feuerbach and Marx, and then carries through some original developments of Hegel’s thought by Bloch.

The essay on “The Dialectical Method,” translated here, discloses Bloch’s deep philosophical erudition and his ability to make the most complex philosophical ideas come alive. In his typical aphoristic, gnomic, and suggestive style,⁷ Bloch introduces Hegelian dialectics dialectically. He shows how Hegel’s philosophical categories emerged from a dialectical appropriation of the classical philosophical tradition and he illustrates and illuminates the central categories of dialectics with examples from Hegel, other philosophers, and his own thought. I know of no better introduction to dialectical thinking and the basic categories of dialectics.

Part of Bloch’s project in *Subjekt–Objekt* is to show the Hegelian

roots of Marxian dialectics, the similarities between Hegel's and Marx's mode of thought, and the advances in Marx over Hegel.⁸ Yet the book brought him into conflict with the ideological commissars of the German Democratic Republic because of its deep sympathy for Hegel which the party ideologues felt was an "ideological deviation."⁹ Eventually Bloch emigrated from the GDR in 1961 after the building of the Berlin Wall and lived in Tübingen until his death in 1977 at age 92. Here he became one of the most influential philosophers in Germany, yet his work never received the wide impact of Adorno, Benjamin, Heidegger, Marcuse, or Lukács. This is unfortunate for Bloch's corpus contains a treasure house of philosophical, political, and aesthetic writings. Bloch often talked of the "unclaimed heritage" of emancipatory ideas in the bourgeois cultural heritage; looking back on Bloch's work, it is fitting to characterize his own immense corpus of writings, 17 volumes in the Suhrkamp edition, as an unclaimed heritage. Hopefully, his writings will begin receiving the attention in the English-speaking world that they so richly deserve and some translators and publishers will take on the task of translating in their entirety such major works as *Subjekt—Objekt*, *Der Geist der Utopie*, and his magnum opus *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*.

NOTES

1. See the discussion of Bloch's philosophy and its reception in Douglas Kellner and Harry O'Hara, "Utopia and Marxism in Ernst Bloch," *New German Critique*, Number 9 (Fall 1976): 11–34.
2. Four volumes of Bloch's writings have been translated by Herder and Herder (now Seabury): *On Karl Marx*, *Man on His Own*, *Atheism in Christianity* and *A Philosophy of the Future*. Unfortunately, these translations are full of errors and omissions and cannot be relied upon. Moreover, Bloch's major works remain untranslated. In Germany, by contrast, Suhrkamp published a 17 volume Taschenbuch Werkausgabe and by the time of his death in 1977 had published 44 different texts by Bloch that sold over one million copies.
3. Bloch, "Karl Marx, Death and Apocalypse," in *Man on His Own* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971): 43.
4. On Bloch's Aristotelianism, see *Avicenna und die Aristotelische Linke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1963).
5. Bloch, "Zur Ontologie des Noch-Nicht-Seins" in *Ernst Bloch: Auswahl aus seinen Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967): 42.
6. Bloch, "Subjekt—Objekt" (Berlin: 1951 and 1955). See the reviews by H.H. Holz and Hermann Lübbe in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, Vol. 73, pp. 518 and 521, and by Iring Fettscher in *Philosophische Literaturanzeiger*, Vol. 7 (1954–55): 214–225. Reviews of the slightly enlarged 1962 edition by Jürgen von

Kempski and Holz are in *Ernst Blochs Wirkung. Ein Arbeitsbuch zum 90. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975): 57–64.

7. George Steiner correctly notes the importance of style in Bloch's work: "Bloch seizes on metaphoric and marginal aspects of the Marxist programme — the end of human alienation, the withering away of the state — and puts them at the centre. He can only do so, and retain some measure of coherence by force of style. Bloch's processes of statement and discourse are inseparable from the lapidary, gnomic, and rhapsodic means of his prose. Perhaps alone among committed Marxist thinkers, he is a deliberate stylist, and his books belong as much to the history of rhetoric as they do to that of philosophic or polemic argument." In *Times Literary Supplement*, October 3, 1975: 1128.
8. See especially the chapter on "Dialektik und Hoffnung" in *Subjekt–Objekt*, translated by Mark Ritter in *New German Critique*. Number 9 (Fall 1976): 3–10.
9. See the collective work *Ernst Blochs Revision des Marxismus* (Berlin: 1957) for attacks on Bloch by the ideologues of the GDR. Discussion of Bloch's interpretation of Hegel and his polemics with official Communist ideologues is found in Iring Fetscher, *Marx and Marxism* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971): 111ff..

Douglas Kellner

1. The idiot never notices that everything has two sides. He works with wooden ideas, with simple uniform ideas at which he can stop for breath and in which nothing happens. If he were to think a thought through to its end, he would notice that a struggle is taking place, that objections arise within which enrich it and disarrange its content. A is not always A, B must also be posited, and it is precisely consistency which shows B to be the contradiction. Above the consequent span C arises as apex and unity; that is until C splits too, and a new unity of contradictions emerges in irresistible dialectical development. Actual thought never runs in straight lines, like thought which is fixed, cut and dried, in which nothing expands or changes and which is therefore incapable of doing justice to transformation. Thought moves in triangles. These triangles, consisting of contradiction, unity, new contradiction, new unity, and so on, do not need to be schematically traced out each time. That would be incompatible with the free agility of elastic thought. Indeed, the triangle is not the only possible form, more contradictions than just this A and B are possible and they do not all have to refer to the same point of unity. But reliable, actual thought never takes a straight course, rigid and unchanged, like the rhythm of the nodding head of the pagoda or the dreadful, monomaniac, thoroughly undialectical thought of the madman. A man who continually entangles him-

self in contradictions is not for that a dialectician. If he cannot find his way out of the contradictions, he is much more a charlatan and, in the end, a perfect image of chaos. But thought which seeks a viable course, set on finding solutions, without going through the dialectical turn in which no determination is complete in itself, lands in chaos from the other side, namely in the chaos of rigidity. It cannot comprehend what is living and on the terrain of transformation — there is no other — with its fixed clumsiness, it will always stumble.

2. Dialectic in Hegel (just as in Kant, but first properly in Fichte) has three levels: (1) immediate unity of the concept, (2) opposition of the concept against itself, (3) reunification of the concept with itself through sublation of the contradiction. Put in another way: (1) the level of abstract understanding or the simply posited thesis, (2) the level of negative rational reflection or the antithesis, what Hegel called (emphasizing crisis as essential to it) the level of negation, of conflict, of collision, of difference, (3) the level of positive rational mediation; that is, negation of the negation or synthesis. None of these three levels may be isolated and maintained against the others, they must penetrate each other and in their finiteness perpetually transcend themselves, keeping the stream of determinations flowing. As is wellknown, it is the *fluidity*, the thorough historicity of the concepts, that aspect of becoming, in which the Hegelian dialectic has its vitality and which expresses the content of life as well as constituting it. The three dialectical determinations are not three separate parts, they cannot be treated as isolated topics, like in a school textbook. Rather, Hegel sees them as the living concept, conceptualized vitality in one. They are “moments of everything that is logical—real, that is of each concept or of each truth” [Enc. § 78].

If thought stops at the standpoint of the thesis, then it is abstract and dogmatic; it “remains at the fixed determinacy and differentiation of the same things against others” [Enc. § 80]. If the standpoint of the antithesis is maintained, scepticism emerges; “it contains the bare negation, the result of the dialectical turn” [Enc. § 81]. Hegel accords scepticism relative honour: “The technique,” he says in the *History of Philosophy* discussing ancient scepticism (Pyrrhon, Sextus Empiricus), “of showing for every presupposition that it is nothing fixed, nothing in and for itself is of the utmost importance.” However, if scepticism is reified, absolutized, then Hegel calls it, just like dogmatism, “laziness of thought.” It balks at the third standpoint, the higher, scientifically completed standpoint of the synthesis, which is indeed pregnant with its own contradiction. Dialectic is so restlessly penetrating; it pre-

sents the movement immanent to the concept by virtue of its negativity. It is, as Hegel says in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* with this amazing image, “the bacchanalian whirl in which no member is not intoxicated” [II, p. 36].¹ It is the true and the false, the positive and the negative, the night of contradictions and the daylight of solution in ever new outcome. This sharply illustrates the fact that the truth is not a minted coin “which can be simply given or pocketed” [II, p. 30],² rather the truth is its own dialectical development or process. For Hegel that is the only empirical: Dialectic, in that it continually comprises in a new object the negativity of the first one, “is the experience of it” [II, p. 70].³ Or again: “This dialectical movement which consciousness executes on itself — on its knowledge as well as on an object — insofar as the new, true object arises to consciousness out of it, this movement is precisely what is called experience” [II, p. 70].⁴ In Hegel dialectic is not at all intended as a mere midwifery of conversation, or a petty-fogging cleverness which is inimical to truth; it is no mere playing with concepts. It is “the actual governing motion of the thing itself,” in short it is that organ of experience through which the content of the world experiences itself.

A world of struggle appears, a world split within itself never coming to a standstill. It is the storminess, the rhythm of respiration in the overthrow of the given which runs right through Hegel’s dialectic; it derives from the French Revolution. The young Marx perceives this in a letter to his father where he describes the dialectic as objective and at the same time as the transformation of things: “Here the object itself must be overheard in its own development, it is the ratio of the thing itself which must develop out of its inner contradictions and find unity within itself.”⁵ The world is fiery nature full of driving contradiction in all its spheres, eruptive like spring: “The bud,” says Hegel in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, “disappears as the blossom bursts forth, and one could say that the former is refuted by the latter. In the same way the fruit declares the blossom to be a false existence of the plant, and the fruit supplants the blossom as the truth of the plant. These forms do not only differ, they also displace each other because they are incompatible” [II, p. 4].⁶ And in the attained state within becoming (*Gewordenheit*) its contradiction is maturing, the negation of what has become (*das Geworden*) is ripening, which transcends it. Thus, as Hegel quite clearly recognized, wealth produces poverty itself, and each former society produces the elements of the next, those which represent the contradiction to the existing society and which explode the encrustations in which there is no longer any truth

or reality. Hegel concludes his *Introduction to the History of Philosophy* thus, in a manner not quite what one would expect from the supposed state philosopher of Prussia:

Often it (the spirit) appears to have forgotten, to have lost itself; but internally divided it is internal development — as Hamlet says of the spirit of his father, ‘Well said, old mole! Canst work i’ the ground so fast?’ [Act I, Scene V] — until strengthened within, it breaks through the earth’s crust — which separates spirit from its concept — shattering it. At such times spirit has put on the seven-league boots when this crust, a soul-less rotten edifice, collapses and it moves on with a new youthfulness [XV, p. 685].⁷

Hence the subversive aspect of the dialectic, the second member, the antithetical, the critical-nihilistic element; it can never become the “laziness of thought” like absolutized skepticism. There is nothing of laziness in this second member; negation which, not isolated, but within the total dialectical context, is most extraordinary energetic. It puts everything petrified to the sword. It is the shattering and the destruction which break open a path for the new; Hegel presents the dialectic as an uninterrupted process of *breakthroughs*. The unity or synthesis which forms at each point is not merely a harmonized unity of contradictions, which is a feature of all previous dialectic up to Hegel. Hegel calls this unity, using an intentionally offensive expression, “unity of unity and contradictions”; shot through with contradiction itself and no harmonious compromise, it continues in its explosive motion. It moves as a series of abrupt changes and leaps, as a prepared and mediated series certainly, but one which has nothing to do with the fatal category of gradualness or peaceful development as adjustment to something given. Sudden qualitative change takes place, the wave breaks, when a definite quantity is attained it is transformed. The new grows within the old, then its hour has come, when the time is ripe, it tears itself loose from the old with a leap; it advances dialectically, decisively, suddenly. Hegel often describes this triumph of the new, most beautifully in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* speaking of “our time of birth and transition to a new period”:

Just as in the case of the child the first breath it draws after long silent nourishment terminates the gradualness of the merely quantitative progression — a qualitative leap and a new child is born, so, too, the spirit that educates itself matures quietly and slowly toward the new form, dissolving one particle of the edifice of its previous world after another, while its tottering is suggested only

by some symptoms here and there: Frivolity as well as the boredom which opens up in the establishment and the indeterminant apprehension of something unknown are harbingers of a forthcoming change. This gradual crumbling which did not alter the physiognomy of the whole is interrupted by the break of day that, like lightning, all at once reveals the edifice of the new world [II, p. 10].⁸

None of this implies that that which is old, false, that which is no longer effective, is totally destroyed in the new epoch. History is essential to Hegel's thought, history not only as revolution but also as heritage, as living tradition. Hegel is a fanatic for substantial memory, so much so that at the end of his journey through history he calls off the further development of the dialectic. Hegel calls a halt to the revolutions of the dialectic in his own time; he neither mentions nor seriously considers what is actually new, i.e., that which is emerging now or in the foreseeable future. The new which fills Hegel's dialectic at every turning point and to which the dialectic does justice as the richest affinity to becoming is, for Hegel the historian, the new within a *passive state* (*Stillgelegten*), within what has ceased to become (*Gewordenheit*) and its precepts. That is the tribute which Hegel's dialectic, despite the French Revolution within it, pays to the historical school and its closed intellectual method. Accordingly Hegel's dialectical process, as it progresses from level to level in sublations (*Aufhebungen*), is "sublation" not only in the sense of destruction or liquidation. It is just as much "sublation" in the sense of preservation, conservation; this constitutes the side of faith, the backward turned face of the Janus head of the Hegelian dialectic. It is that aspect which above all conditions the synthesis and which makes the dialectic *the inheritor of history*. This too has its place in the dialectic of process, its issue contains not only the last attained stage but all previous stages also.

3. Formal logic teaches that A cannot at the same time be not-A. Dialectic does not deny this proposition completely but it corrects it; in the dialectic A cannot *remain* not-A. At any one time there are contradictions everywhere; this teaching, which sounds so audacious, is not only superior to but also older than formal logic. It had transcended the principle of noncontradiction even before this was formulated as the axiom of common sense. The progression of thought through the appearance of oppositions within one and the same unity begins with Socrates and Plato, but with them more as an instrument for fruitfully developing conversation through the contraposition of objections. A dialectic of self-moving content is seldom seen here and

is never one of the development of content, of the movement within essence. But Socrates' statement "I know only that I know nothing," in that it does not remain simply what it is is thoroughly dialectical; the contradiction within drives it on to resolution. Plato ascribes dialectic to the philosophical instinct right from its birth: Eros, that is the impulse to ideas, is introduced in the *Symposium* as the son of riches and poverty so that he has both natures, possessions and lack of possessions at the same time.

The dialogue *Cratylus* shows this contradiction to be already operative within language: Just as each sentence contains an unmovable as well as a movable element, so true knowledge may not neglect either. For Plato, dialectic is the transformation of immediate opinion into thought. It is the art of contemplation which confuses the limited conceptions of men as well as resolving them, in the sense of the Socratic method of radical questioning and will to definition, but on a methodically conscious level. In the *Sophist* Plato goes far beyond mere explanation of words and meanings; he calls dialectic "the true fire of Prometheus, without which no technically correct treatment of any object whatsoever is possible." The *Sophist*, certainly at an obscure and moot point, tries to show that in the being of every concept there is at the same time an otherness, that is with reference to another concept.

It is this otherness, this relative nonbeing, which first brings the concepts into relations with each other instead of letting them remain confined to their own self-identity. This kind of dialectic is developed most emphatically throughout the dialogue *Parmenides*, it is applied to the contradiction between the one and the many and the union which persists between them despite this contradiction. Here, Plato argues ironically against the unmoved Oneness of the Eleatics, although, as we shall see, despite his dialectics, in the end he gives primacy to this unmoved Oneness. He says quite plainly that the One is as unthinkable without the Many as vice versa, they each presuppose the other and thereby constitute the world of appearance as a differentiated unity in determinate diversity (manifold). In this dialogue Plato paved the way for a dialectic of concepts highly suggestive of Hegel's own. Not only the One and the Many but also the similar and the dissimilar, movement and rest, greatness and smallness, the whole and the parts are recorded in their conflicting dialectical transitions.

Nevertheless, the platonic form of dialectic is only first from a distance a dialectic of content and in no way the intentional reproduction of objective reality itself, as in Hegel. Plato had three sources for

his dialectic: the Socratic movement of concepts in the conversation, Heraclitus' principle of becoming, and the Eleatics' principle of unmoved being. As mentioned above, the Eleatic concept of being suddenly obtains primacy in Plato's dialectic. Plato agrees with Heraclitus only with respect to the sensuous, this is indeed a continuous flowing and becoming. But he assures us that of that which is in flux, always merely becoming, there can be no science and consequently, as dialectic science is the elevation from immediate opinion to thought proper, nondialectic. The actual as well as the knowable in the appearances is solely the unchangeable idea in which they participate and whose dialectic, as purely logical-ontological, stands beyond the flux-content of appearances.

Aristotle is the first to teach a mediation between appearance and essence with his concept of the immanently developed form-idea (*Entelechy*) which actualizes itself in appearing. Here is that concreteness which afterwards enables Hegel to attempt to develop his dialectic as that of the content of the world and not merely one of abstract concepts. Thus Hegel is a student of Plato only in his *Logic* (determinations like "something" and "other," "one," and "many" quite clearly derive from the *Parmenides*), in his philosophy of nature and of spirit, Aristotle is more important. Aristotle is certainly much less of a formal dialectician than Plato, for the most part he reduces dialectic technique to the presentation of cases for and against various suppositions to the careful consideration of contradictory standpoints or perplexities (*Apories*) which arise. But despite the small role which he confers on the dialectic, he is much more of a dialectician of content. Precisely because he brings the eminently dialectical concept of relation between appearance and idea, namely that of the form-idea which actualizes itself in appearing ("imprinted form which in living develops itself" — "*geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt*," as Goethe translated Aristotle's *Entelechy*). In the *Timaeus*, however, Plato's most profound dialogue and the one most concerned with the cosmos, he plainly says: "Only the one which is unchangeable is comprehended through contemplation by means of reason, against that the other which becomes and passes away is grasped through opinion by means of sensual perception, without reason." Thus in Plato the Eleatic and unmoved triumphs over Heraclitus and becoming; his dialectic is that of eternal relation (community, *Koinonia*) between eternal ideas.

The dialectic of content focuses solely on the movable element. If this was not the dominant factor in Plato it certainly was in Heraclitus, the philosopher of fire. For Heraclitus, who was much less schooled in

the abstract, conflict is the father of things, not merely of conversation. "Everything is flowing, one cannot step into the same river twice"; a student of Heraclitus added to this that one cannot even do it once. "The one which is divided within itself persists in itself like the harmony of the stretched bow." This Heraclitean proposition shows the content of the world itself as unified contradiction. Thus Hegel cries out in his *History of Philosophy* when he comes to Heraclitus: "Now we can see land," whereby it does not matter that this land is flame, fire as the substrate of contradictorily unified transformation. Formal logic posits the principle of noncontradiction (i.e., the irreconcilability of contradictory predicates of the same subject) as an axiom on which correct thought is founded. In Heraclitus this so-called axiom was already transcended before it was ever formulated. In just the same way with the saying *Panta rhei* (everything flows) Heraclitus had already transcended skepticism; moreover, he made it relative and fruitful before it appeared as a doctrine. It is interesting at this point to consider a back-dated observation — i.e., one that had been changed from an entry in a commentary into a report about Heraclitus — of Diogenes Laertius; it could also have been said of Hegel. According to this Heraclitus would have remained a skeptic as long as he searched for a unified ratio; he ceases to be one when he sees reason based on discord and contradiction.

The nature of reason as fiery metamorphosis had been accepted by skepticism itself; in Hegel skepticism captures — likewise indubitably — the negative-rational (the destructive) element in things. Heraclitus also points with great assurance to essence in motion through the concept of fire; other less fortunate substrate determinations are the perpetually kneaded clay and the perpetually stirred-up mixture. Because, as Hegel says, movement, transformation is in fact the existing contradiction, it is that because each instant of the transformation of one state into another (e.g., the dawn) unites within it the contradictory predicates. Thus, with the force of the greatest paradox, it can be said that Heraclitus was the Hegel of antiquity; and so it is not without reason that this philosopher was considered the most obscure.

Indeed, in that *dialectic as a whole* is set against fixed opinion, it appears seldomly or not at all in occasional philosophers or in those who could not or did not wish to think their concerns through to the end. The later skeptics, the Greeks as well as the English, did not think things through to the end, although they, because of their sense for dilemma and contradiction, at least reached the dialectical foreland. Skepticism has often brilliantly purified thought from fixed

opinions and prejudices, but it never got further than doubt in human reason altogether, declaring it incapable of resolving the contradictions. Not surprisingly, with this kind of halfheartedness relativism was the result; there again it never attained the relativism of creative *sublations* as in dialectic, which thus, as noted above, was able to evaluate skepticism and use it. Instead, its relativism became one of fixed dilemmas and the flight from them into laxity, into bad immediacy (sensualism), or into complete irrationalism.

The dialecticians, in contrast, with Plato as their teacher and Heraclitus as their progenitor, remained true to reason even where, indeed exactly where, they let the straight become bent and the bent straight. That was the case with Plato, first properly with Heraclitus, but also with all later philosophers who have traveled the treacherous waters of the dialectical contradiction, that is the real world. It would take us too long to name all the other participants in the dialectic; they all have a bit of Heraclitean profundity in common. Here we have the Neoplatonist Proclus with the three terms (*Dreiklang*) of the first triad of development: persistence, emergence, return. Then there is Nicholas of Cusa at the end of the Middle Ages which had been ushered in by the Neoplatonists, with the mathematically illustrated doctrine of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the unity of the contradictions in the infinitely small and the infinitely large. In his shoemaker's workshop, Jacob Böhme discovered the dialectically necessary relation that light must have to darkness in order that it become manifest on an "object" (*Gegenwurf*). Thus also the dialectical relation between goodness and anger and that between the divine and the devilish.

Hegel took many things from these people, most from Jacob Böhme; a mystic could teach a logician, at least a proper logician. And it is precisely because the usual academic logic, with its axiom of the a priori forbidden contradiction, is not a proper logic, only a scheme of opinions that stands opposed to all these extensions. It contains, like chicken meat, only black or white, only either—or. Thus, as Hegel mocked, it forbids the utterance of anything more than tautologies, identical judgments like: Gaius is Gaius, or a planet is a planet. Essentially it regards any suggestion of a differentiation of the predicate and the subject as illegal; because any such differentiation transcends the abstract identity which is defended by the principle of the forbidden contradiction. Differentiation as such is the beginning of the contradiction, just as the contradiction is the completion of the differentiation, and abstract identity is nothing other than undeveloped differentiation, undeveloped contradiction. From the beginning Hera-

clitus brought such insights into the field from which they originate, that is the world. There the *Pante rhei* (everything flows) is so active that modern conservatism has only the name in common with that of yesterday; often not even that. The transformation of things is a singularly material contradiction, it goes right through from the differential of mechanical motion to the class-tension in history, to the two or more interpenetrating souls which fill the breast of each ideology. Thus dialectic as the logic of process reflects in the whole history of its concept this provocative and history-making claim: there is still no identity. Because no object is complete within itself and without otherness, conflict is the father of things.

4. At the very least man lives within relationships which help him to establish his identity, i.e., to humanize his existence. The Russian democrat Alexander Herzen found the best expression for this: Dialectic is the algebra of the revolution. It is that because it comprehends the contradictions which appear in history precisely and confronts them with a theoretical armor that does not remain merely theoretical. However, gratitude demands that we also remember the philosopher without whom the dialectic would never have been so creatively understood. It is Leibniz, dialectical throughout in the technique of the differential calculus, which he invented, dialectical in his conception of rest as infinitely small motion and of equality as disappearing inequality; otherwise no dialectician because of his basic proposition that nature makes no leaps.

Without Leibniz the dialectic, though still full of vitality, would have scarcely been so full of its peculiarly explosive concept: *tendency*. In Leibniz the final unities are power-points and their behavior is to move from restricted, passive states to active states, from obscure to clear ideas. That is the "*appetitio*" of the monads, or their desire, a striving for the unfolding, "*evolutio*," the unraveling of their own content. The monad is a kind of being that seeks a way out of darkness into light. Leibniz defines them, to a large extent in agreement with the beginning Enlightenment, as the element-citizen of the age of the Enlightenment. But the "*appetitio*" is subject to a vital constraint; in Leibniz striving, tendency is the form of existence of restricted activity. It is highly indicative that the concepts with which Leibniz expresses this "*inquiétude poussant*" are oriented to the behavior of gases, these essentially expansive substances. As a gas, at a steady temperature, is compressed to a half, a third, a quarter, etc., of its volume, so its expansion tendency increases two-fold, three-fold, four-fold, etc. That is according to the law which Mariotte, a contemporary of Leib-

niz, formulated in 1686: The pressure of a gas is inversely proportional to its volume.

Leibniz energetically universalized this law, uniting the tendency of his monads with an obstructed power of expansion, and, furthermore, he united it with the future. As an example he selects the resistance which fixed elastic bodies exhibit when they are subjected to pressures or deformations. This resistance is not the gas pressure because the restless, incoherent gas molecules exercise a pressure over a relatively wide area without any compression. But the essence of this resistance is that *increase through confinement* first formulated as a law for gases. Thus says Leibniz, boldly depicting the future as open space: "Just as in the elastic body which is constricted its greater dimension exists as striving, thus the future state within the monad." In a reply to Bayle in 1702, Leibniz uses a strangely anticipatory expression, which puts the form of existence of restricted activity together with pregnancy: "One can say that in the soul, just as everywhere else, the present is pregnant with the future." A social utopia of the eighteenth century, Mercier's "L'An 2240," used this quotation as its motto. Further, Marx recalls it in his famous dictum that violence is the midwife of a society which is pregnant with a future society.

Leibniz was most certainly a highly conciliatory philosopher, but his concept of tendency, the "*inquiétude poussante*", is, precisely by the force of his analogy to the expansion tendency of constricted bodies, unmistakably revolutionary. It indicates much more than the mere transition from obscure to clearer ideas, it prefigures the Hegelian dialectic, distinguishing it from all previous dialectic. For this reason the correlation of the tendency concept in Leibniz with a concept of striving, which increases with constriction, is important for the influence which Leibniz had on later thinkers; it has formerly not received the attention it deserves. It is even more important because it helps explain the revolutionary use to which the Hegelian dialectic could later be put. The Leibnizian tendency concept brought this subversive element into the dialectic, thus it could later be rediscovered and employed. Hegel describes the dialectic as explosive and extensive. Long before, Leibniz had given it a kind of relationship to the kinetic theory of gases, to the expansion tendency which over a period of time did not appear to increase against the old kettle wall. The greater dimension is the future; in Hegel as the immediately following logical category or as the next emerging historical formation.

5. The dialectic is especially accused of improperly humanizing things. Thus nobody is a more bitter opponent than the positivist, for

him dialectic is the worst of all possible “additions.” But the positivist Ernst Mach once called the atom an addition to the given. He spoke contemptuously of “atomistic nature-mythology” which had merely replaced the animistic mythology; he called atoms, indeed also ions and electrons, “phantoms of the imagination” (*Erkenntnis und Irrtum — Knowledge and Error* (1906), p. 106f.). Mach’s positivism declared all of that, including quantum theory, an “inferno of adventurous modern ideas.”

Then the unlucky thing happened: The path of the atom was made visible, it was photographed in a cloud chamber. Since that time the atom at least has found approval, the positivist no longer rejects it as a figment of early Greek thought. However, something like a real contradiction, contradiction as constitution of the object, still appears to him as an element of fantasy, having no place in a “scientific philosophy,” as the philistine conceives it. One would think that the economic crisis, the imperialist collision in two world wars, and similar phenomena would have sufficed to prove the reality of contradiction in the world. The dialectic of these processes does not need a cloud chamber to become visible, on the contrary. It looks as if, using Leibniz’s expression, the present is pregnant with the future; although this expression is the most anthropomorphic possible, namely a gynecological one.

The atom too behaves, as well in theory as in practice, dialectically. Not only to the extent that the electrons, in whose motion the atom consists, represent something so full of contradiction as wave and particle at the same time, but also in that the splitting of the atom sets free energy bound within it. Thus the so-called building blocks of the world, which are being so badly administered at the moment, are in no sense stable; to say nothing of the enormous complex of life and society. The dialectic pulls he who does not wish to come along behind it, those who are willing it leads; in both cases the belief that it has an invalid humanizing effect can change nothing. The world moves itself; it is not dialectic that is improperly anthropomorphic but rather positivism which, because it is so, disavows it. Since colleagues understand each other best when they are amongst each other, we recommend that all those empiricists who genuinely want to be friends of experience consider the following unexpected sentence from one of their own. It comes from the well-known agnostic du Bois-Reymond, who with his *Ignoramus-Ignorabimus*⁹ has commended himself so much to the theory of ignorance. Indeed, he had clearer moments than others of his kind; on the occasion of an original observation of change of texture he remarks: “A thought can never deviate so far from reality as

reality, in the course of time, separating itself from itself." The insight of this statement referring to something deviating, better something variable, adds to reality only what it adds itself.

The real objection against the Hegelian kind of dialectic is not that it humanizes but that it reduces everything to concepts, despite the fluidity of the determinations, despite the "bacchanalian whirl, in which no member is not intoxicated." In Hegel the activity of the contradiction happens far too much by the book, it is seldom imposed on the movement of the thing instead of being elicited from it. This imposed form, always the three-step, even where four or more elements are really active; this schematism is idealistic, because idealism is pure coherence developing within itself, which even in its negations is undisturbed; but materialism is discontinuity. Everything in Hegel is subject to this schematically maintained three-step, an a priori prosessual waltz. Four-term dialectics, as in the construction of world history (Oriental, Greek, Roman, German Empires) is an exception. The extension of his concepts to cover everything is Hegel's panlogism: the complete equation of true thought and actual being. It seduces Hegel into formulations which from his standpoint are fully consistent but are much too exaggerated, excessive. In fact they are afflicted with an excess of idealism in its extremist form: The point-like fixed stars have the "precision to remain with the abstract identity of light," and sun, planet, moon, and comet "represent the moments of the concept up in the sky" [VIII, pp. 134, 120].¹⁰ Things make judgments and draw conclusions; the planetary system, the State, everything rational-actual belong to one enormous syllogism. In this, Hegel's dialectic maintains one of its roots, that of the Socratic-Platonic conversation, but, precisely because this root is transposed from the dialogue to the content of the world, there emerges a universe consisting of conversation material, i.e., an external world as discourse. From this perspective Hegelian dialectic appears as the discourse of the world-spirit with itself, developing through objections and demonstrating itself in syllogisms with premises, intermediate propositions, and conclusions. This constitutes the Hegelian concept-mythology; the subject which the dialectic employs as a vehicle for its ever richer subject-object relations is not the actual, but the significantly less spiritual subject of history. It is not the working man as the productive force in technological union with the natural productive forces. Hegel calls the carrier, the subject of history with complete idealism, "*Volksgeist*." Thus world history appears, according to its respective subject carrier, as a logically well-formed "Fugue of Nations" constructed from "*Volksgeistern*" and their succession.

Here it helps nothing that Hegel sharpens the spirit in its respective second member: the contradiction. He contends in the strongest possible manner that the level of the contradiction is not one of mere objections in dialogue, no mere aesthetic contest. He sees real work in the bifurcations and the perpetually self-dividing renovations; according to Hegel the life and self-knowledge of the world-spirit should not be easy, not the play of the logos or even of love with itself. "This idea," says the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, "sinks to the level of edification and even insipidity when seriousness, pain, and the patience and work of the negative have no place in it" [II, p. 15].¹¹

However, the leaven of the antithesis as the thorny, stinging negation never extricates itself from pure logicality. Being-outside-itself also, with its especially strong impulse to forward movement, is supposed to be deduced from the pure concept, from that which is purely self dividing within itself. It remains unclear why the world, if it is pure logos, does not live an easy life. Indeed, why does the spirit see it necessary to undertake process at all with antitheses, differences, collisions on every level. It is incomprehensible, if the world really consists of nothing but the logos and its ether, why the absolute is not complete at the beginning, a consonance which makes dissonance unthinkable, much less positing it itself. In pure spirit identity or the absolute for itself would prevail from the first; this absolute could really be "shot out of a pistol," in that phrase which Hegel uses to attack the mystics and their immediate oneness with God. Instead, the pure idea "discharges" itself to "its reflection, nature," that is to a nature which Hegel at times (in the "troubled, unhappy existence of the animals") sees as a journey into hell. If the idea survives this stage, it then undergoes all the difficulties of a historical development: "It is to be said of the absolute that it is essentially result, that it is first at the end what it truly is" [II, p. 15].¹² All this cannot be derived from Hegel's panlogism, not even by means of the contradiction originating there; because no contradiction could originate in the pure life of the idea. Neither the impulse to which this contradiction gives rise, nor the diversity of the forms in the world to which it brings its bifurcation, nor a wearisome world-process could emerge out of the complete pure spirit. Not even when Hegel explicates the process, acknowledging the original closedness of pure spirit, as a "circle of circles" [Enz. § 515]. Unless the reality of the dialectical process is denied and is presented as having been developed purely as an intellectual method, which, indeed, contrary to the logic of becoming, also happens in Hegel: "Appearance is the process of coming to be and passing away that does not itself come

to be and pass away, rather it is in itself and constitutes the actuality and movement of the life of truth" [II, p. 36].¹³

If, however, the process is taken as real, and the "seriousness of the negative" is taken seriously, then it is not difficult to see that a completely different element than spirit constitutes the leaven of the dialectic, there where it first appears as the *dialectic of reality*, *Real-dialektik* without panlogism, without the conceptual mythology. The actual dialectical impulse is need; only this produces the contradiction as something unsatisfied, as something unfulfilled by the world confronting it, the perpetually emerging and exploding contradiction. Every half fulfillment, every form of movement which has become deficient, every historical society rears in its lap the bearer of a need which goes beyond it and, with it, a more highly developed capability to fulfill this need. This need, like the active capability, contradicts the old form of existence, thus they become explosive; thus they carry the call to the future, that is to the next level which relatively transcends the contradiction. This is the origin of the explosive tendency in the dialectic, an origin as need, productive force, hope, not from pure spirit. The pure spirit certainly could not set the logical categories into motion and development, let alone the actual categories or the forms of existence of history and its world. The feet on which the dialectic moves are those of the working producers of history, not those of the spirit, the pure spirit, which has been abstracted from history and mythologized. Dialectic is no virgin birth from the supposed independent life of the concepts and no *perpetuum mobile*. The dialectical ratio of history is that of the production process and its real subject-object relations; only in history is there a dialectically self-developing relation of man to man and to nature.

Of course, Hegel noticed himself that the concepts cannot walk on their own. He recognized the problem of the impulse to dialectical movement and added a factor which, although it does not refer to the will, is certainly not purely logical: It is the factor of *totality*. Hegel works with this at every point, or rather he lets it work for him. Logically, totality is the unity of the "universal and the particular" and thus in Hegel's philosophy of nature and of spirit it is concrete wholeness, and then completeness. It is the completely mediated for-itself, the "absolute," and its opposite is the patchwork, the incomplete, the finite. In that the incomplete aspires to completion and the finite is precisely that which collides with its limitations, need enters the concept from a completely unexpected side; in this case, as the will to overcome the fixed boundary in the form of ability and its abstraction: the ought.

All finite things consume themselves, and it is their function to be consumed: "Everything finite is that which has to transcend itself. Thus the dialectical constitutes the moving soul of scientific progress and is the sole principle which gives immanent connection and necessity to the content of science and which ensures that the true, not external *elevation* above the finite lies within it" [Enz. § 81]. This neediness has a ring of something nonconceptual about it, like religion, precisely because of the reference of patchwork to totality, of finiteness to the absolute. The dialectical transcendence of the finite is equated with elevation above the finite, and the unrest within the finite, which consumes it and indeed at the same time determines it as that which is to be consumed, appears as the last motor of dialectical motion. It is a motor which still signifies the mythological, but certainly not a concept-mythology, it is full of affect, emotion, intensity; and intensity, regardless of how well it can be logically comprehended, is, originally, not a logical category. The finite, as this unrest which extends beyond itself, becomes, in the *Logic*, a special intensity of contradiction, indeed of the fundamental contradiction: "That which is posited with its immanent limit as its contradiction by which it is driven out of itself, that is the finite" [III, p. 137].¹⁴

As a result of this incongruence with the universality of its class, finally with the whole totality, the organic finite carries within itself the germ of death, but also the productive power of instinct and life. Thus Hegel says with clear reference to hunger, destitution, the desire to surmount the limitations:

If an existence contains the concept not only as an abstract in itself [like the stone, like all of inorganic nature] but as a totality existing for itself, as instinct, as life, sensation, imagination and so on, then out of itself it overcomes its limitations and reaches the other side. The plant overcomes its limited state as seed, the seed becomes the developed plant, the flower blooms and so on. The experience of limitations, like hunger, thirst, etc., is the impulse to overcome them, and it performs this overcoming. Pain is felt, and it is the prerogative of sensitive nature to feel pain, it is a negation in itself within whose feeling it is determined as a limitation precisely because this experience contains the feeling of its *self*, which is *totality* and is beyond that determinateness. *If this totality were not beyond such determinateness, then it would not experience this as its negation* and would have no pain [III, pp. 144–145].¹⁵

Thus we find that, here and there, need forms the fundamental contradiction to something which has become a limitation; incongruence with the immanent totality feeds the dialectic of coming to be and passing away. It is the coincidence of the presence and nonpresence which drives “finitude” to opposition against its conditions.

6. As we said above, pure spirit would be sameness, motionless self-identity. But just how little this identity, this pure spirit is the actual agency in Hegel's philosophy can be gauged by the fierceness and by the exertions involved in the dialectical progression. Hegel makes his start with contemplation, not with the will; nevertheless the spiritual realm of angels in his dialectic is self deception. Wherever this dialectic becomes concrete it shows nothing but real struggle, the struggle for liberation. It shows veils which become chains and bonds, it shows a series of breakthroughs, as if its process ran through a series of prisons; in short, as if it were not at all mere disputation in the conceptual mythological palace of the world-spirit. “The spirit which knows itself as spirit,” says Hegel at the end of the *Phenomenology*, “finds its path in the recollection of the spiritual forms as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their realm” [II, p. 612].¹⁶ Even this organization though, which is supposed to form comprehended history, “the recollection and the Golgatha of absolute spirit, the actuality, truth, and certainty of its throne, without which it would be the lifeless solitary,”¹⁷ — this organization of pure logos could neither contain contradiction nor this exceedingly unplatonic ornate baroque throne. The mindless votaries of Allah exercised no self doubt; if they had, at the very least, Allah would have fallen out of changelessness into movement, out of the sphere of identity into the river of the world fire.

In only one aspect does dialectic appear in Hegel without struggle: there appears a certain homogeneity, at least a relatively placid agreement, as if the world really were spirit. Now, as we have shown above, each of the successively appearing dialectical triads does not only possess the same structure, but also — throughout all transformations — a definite homogeneity of content. The identity of structure is shown in the schematism of the triad, in the monotonously repeated rhythm, extended into every detail, of thesis, antithesis, synthesis; this is purely formal. But besides this, and much more importantly, there is a kind of invariability of *content* which fills the sequence of particular triads and holds it together. Each of them is also materially bud-bloom-fruit; that is, each contains a final rhythm and a final shape as if there were no struggle in the world, and certainly no disorder in struggle. It

is not that something identical is schematically inserted here, rather it is processually maintained through the series, which makes a great difference. This must be understood from the beginning: such relative homogeneity of content in Hegel, however spiritual it may appear, does not in any way originate only in the pure spirit. It is not, or not only, conceptual mythology, although, considering the haunting final shape, it draws upon the most mythological of all triads: the holy trinity.

In fact the relative identity of dialectical content also originates, to a large extent, from *sequentially maintained totality*, that is from a motif which, as *process-motif*, is not at all the same as the *Hen kai pan*, the one and all of the old mythological idealism. Thus all the series of the forms of consciousness of this dialectic are seen to be samples of the same material, namely of the trinity of the Hegelian world-spirit as a *totum*; the contents of the particular theses, antitheses, syntheses are related by blood to each other. One after another they reveal in the respective triad a modified, but sacral "equivalence" of the members or aspects, despite their different significance. This point may be illustrated by a small selection of dialectical triads, a selection which will have to stand for the whole range; for each arbitrary trio in Hegel expresses the trinity in the absolute (just as this, in turn, expresses trinity in mineralogy, botany, zoology, jurisprudence, aesthetics, etc.). If one adds to the Hegelian trio bud-bloom-fruit other similar continuities, such as worm-insect-vertebrate, touch-smell-sight, consciousness-self-consciousness-reason, and law-crime-retribution (justice), then one discovers in each case an "equivalence," often a "concordance," as the arrangement of biblical passages that are related in meaning is called. These concordance, however, are much more of an *eadem sed aliter* (the same, but indeed other) than those of the Bible. Moreover, the strange "equivalences" between the members of the Hegelian dialectic are distinguished from the frivolous, completely free analogies of the romantic philosophy of nature. Hegel's "correspondences" signify the same basic content of thesis-antithesis-synthesis; that is, the content: being-in-itself, being-outside-itself, being-for-itself.

The bud, the sense of touch, the law are all for Hegel the still undetermined in-itself of the respective triads; the bloom, the sense of smell, the crime are all the erupting being-outside-itself; the fruit, the sense of sight, the law of justice, which re-establishes itself against injustice, are sublated being-outside-itself or being-in-and-for-itself. This also appears in Geography: Africa is like the sense of touch, dull-

ness in-itself; Asia is like the intoxicating fragrance of the bloom, splendour of the outside-itself; and Europe is like sight or the fruit, the being-for-itself in the dialectic of the continents. The same appears in aesthetics: The graphic arts form the still peaceful thesis, music is the eruptive sphere of difference, and poetry, which loosens all tongues, is the being-for-itself of the artistic spirit, it is the Europe of the arts. Again in the philosophy of religion: The nature-religions of the orient worship God as the power of the thesis, a God still devoid of any trace of humanity. The religions of spiritual individuality (Judaism and Greco-Roman religion) worship a God who grants audiences, one who bows to the subject. The Christian religion or synthesis worships God as fruit, as the idea which is as much self alienating (becoming human) as eternally returning to itself out of this alienation; thus God is a trinity in-and-for-itself. Finally, in the history of philosophy this pattern of triads more or less culminates in Hegel's dialectic of his own epoch: Fichte is the still abstract undeveloped thesis of reason, the dithyrambic Schelling is the wildly exploding sphere of difference, Hegel concludes the development as the fruit and the opened eye, as the absolute philosophy which has returned to itself.

One or two elements in this *eadem sed aliter* perhaps do not fit completely into the series. For instance, Greek religion is only half-dionysiac or being-outside-itself as the dialectical middle term is supposed to be. In general, however, one finds a wandering omnipresence of the same dialectical content. The whole Hegelian *system* as such gives the outline of the perpetually self-equivalent triads: Logic, or the realm of pure thought before entry into the world, is the being-in-itself of the idea; nature, in its mere interpenetration of necessity and contingency, is the being-outside-itself, the "idea deserting itself," "the unresolved contradiction"; the realm of culture, of the spirit, designates freedom or the idea which has returned to itself, the being-for-itself of the idea. As we have said, one finds these concordances sometimes a little disturbed in the particular instances and not always exactly as they should be according to the high level of idealistic pedantry. For even with the most strident panlogism the material does not fit into the holy trinity, and, despite the fact that Hegel was quite at home in the wealth of the concrete *aliter* in the rhythm of the *eadem*, the basic elements remain the same nevertheless.

There is one problem left: to explain the blooming homogeneity in all this abundance. It does not derive from the content, at least not from that which can be pointed to in any particular case; it originates in the intentional *totum* in the case under consideration. That is, *ana-*

logia entis (the one analogy)¹⁸ confronts the deep sky of a *content-totality* which, though far away, peeks into every detail. From this aspect also, indeed most profoundly from this angle, there emerge corresponding outlooks, characteristic features in Hegel's otherwise so driving dialectic. Hegel had, after all, taken up a tradition which has its origin in the fundamental philosophical intention of the elucidation of an essence which makes itself known in everything. This tradition began with the image of the mirror, a truly magical and oriental image; the Arabic philosopher Alkendi was the first to conceive of the world as a complex of mirror rooms which reflects the whole and the same. Nearer to Hegel stands Nicholas of Cusa with his doctrine "*omnia ubique*," everything is in everything, with the explanation "*In omnibus partibus relucet totum*," the whole is reflected in all of the parts. Nearer still is Leibniz who represents his monads as the mirror of the universe, who, in the *Nouveaux essais* declares the *totum* to be the everywhere identical ground, "*C'est tout comme ici, le fond est partout le même.*"

In Nicholas of Cusa, as in Leibniz and Hegel, the totality, the certainty of which is maintained throughout, is a finished totality; not one which has first to work itself out, no utopian conception. In the end, totality in Hegel is characterized as the mythological fixedness of the Father-Son-Holy Ghost triad, i.e., so that the totality, not merely as pure spirit, has no need of process, unless it is as a luxury or the vanity of an egoism which required a myriad of shining mirrors. Nevertheless, Hegel emphasized more brilliantly and incessantly than any other philosopher that in all parts there is to be found an awareness of the *totum*. Instead of the lazy, that is boundless and aimless, pluralism in which reason declares itself bankrupt, and practice no longer knows what it wants beyond the next day and the immediate interest, it is rather the actually existing context which works in the "*omnia ubique*." The *omnia ubique*, as everything, is not and does not remain the given in its entirety or, indeed, the trinity in a superior spirit which is posited as real. However, it is the form of society which is determinant in each epoch, and finally it is that which unifies history and nature in the processual content. In the goal which is being striven for it is the one necessity of, to use an outmoded expression, the highest good, which pacifies the unrest of the need and striving, that for which it would not be necessary to struggle if it were already available. This kind of totality, the non-existing all, not the existing whole, is the *goal* of the dialectical movement that *holds it together*, exactly as need is its *impulse and motor*. Only one intentional, tendential element of this goal state, indeed so

much, is embedded in each movement and form of movement. This creates relationships, especially of an antithetical kind, right through history; it even establishes many paradoxical vortices of the same things in Hegel's dialectical "equivalences." It does not justify the pedantry of their repetitions (which derive from undisturbed panlogism), but it does justify the relative unity which is maintained through all modifications, through the storm of the forms of his world-spirit.

7. Hegel's dialectic is intolerant of the indolent, that is clear. It can be learned though, and it is high time we discarded this stubborn yes, yes, no, no; high time to correct the abstract belief in fixed facts and their allegedly unchangeable laws. The doctrine of the flux, or river, has as little time for the indolent as the doctrine of the estuary, i.e., the dialectical totality; this doctrine is not only instructive but also admonishing. First, it does not close its eyes to the fact that in all its acts political life is ramified and mediated. Every single moment of history, in particular the history of the struggle for liberation, contains all the others, it contains the totality of all that needs liberating. If the whole, especially the all, is isolated, if lesser or subgoals are absolutized and only these pursued, then the theoretical short-sightedness results in a practical defeat, even where the isolated goal has supposedly been attained. There is no separation between the path and the end, whose *totum* is in every step of the way; at least if it is a path and not a *cul-de-sac*. The great moment often took a rather insignificant form, but this was not because of the form, rather the form was so unimpressive, so weak because the totality of what was happening and what was to be pursued was not perceived at the time.

Second, it frees the consciousness of dialectical mediation in totality from the petrified state in which the narrow-minded understanding holds on to its contradictions. For this understanding there are clear isolated alternatives: either sensual pleasure or peace of mind, either the soap box or the ivory tower, either creeping empiricism which only rarely smells the soles of reality or unworldly idealism à la Don Quixote, as if, as Chesterton once mocked, the human brain must always be divided in conflict: one side repeating invariable calculations while the other dreams impossible dreams. Opportunism, which sees itself as *realpolitik*, in fact maintains itself outside existing reality just as much as utopian radicalism. The one stands under this reality, the other reaches above it, both are thus untrue, both are isolated and exaggerated formations. The dialectic of the *totum* resolves all these abstract dualisms, it opens up a comprehensive viewpoint from which fixed duality disappears. This duality is in fact naïveté. Hegel is quite clear about it:

The oppositions which were otherwise so significant in the forms spirit and material, soul and body, belief and understanding, freedom and necessity and so on have in the progress of knowledge been transformed into the oppositions of reason and sensuality, intelligence and nature, absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity.

The sole interest of reason is to transcend such petrified oppositions. This interest does not appear as setting itself totally against the opposition as such; because division is a necessary factor of life which forms itself through perpetual opposition; totality at the highest vitality, is only possible through restoration out of the deepest separation. Rather, reason sets itself against the absolute fixing of the division by the understanding; the more so when the absolutely opposed elements originate from reason itself." *[Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems, I. p. 173f.]*

Thus dialectic is no rattling of the understanding with apparent skill in confusing every concept, to make the white black, the black white and so on. As objective dialectic, as Hegel means it, as the dialectic of content, its sole interest is the representation of, and the practical relation to, developing truth.

The world actually moves in contradictions, in those whose fluidity, as Heraclitus says, does not allow one to step into the same river twice. As far as sophistical versatility or fraud is concerned, this cannot be shown of the objective dialectic but certainly of its negation. It lies in the delusion of premature or completely false harmony, in the "national community," or also in the more Anglo-Saxon belief that the truth lies somewhere in the middle. It is the easy compromise in which the character deteriorates and the motive power of the contradictions is blunted. In short, it consists of that tepidity which, as is well known, Jesus wanted to spit out of his mouth.

Here emerges yet another feature of the dialectic directed against those who are compliant. It is revealed in such a way that even Hegel does not posit the negative alone, at least not principally, as that which moves everything. He has the negation, the old destructive nothing, perfectly lodged between the thesis and the synthesis, wholly in their middle so that the spirit which perpetually negates cannot make a step without serving progress, the establishment of the good and the better. However, even here Hegel makes certain distinctions; that is, he also notes the useless negative. Precisely in human history he notes nihilistic events of an utterly devastating form without any visible dialectical function. He cites the Peloponnesian War, the Thirty Years' War, and other uselessly destructive, uselessly fatiguing movements. At a note-

worthy point in the *Aesthetic* Hegel even turns fundamentally against the negative as such. That is against Mephistopheles as such as the purely cold, barren contradiction; thus:

that which is purely negative is generally flat and stale in itself and leaves us consequently either empty or drives us back, whether it be used as the motive force of an action or merely as the means to produce a reaction in another. The dreadful, the unhappy, the harshness of dominion and the obduracy of superior power can be borne and held together by the imagination when such characteristics are exalted and carried by the abundant greatness of a character and an aim. Evil as such, however, envy, cowardice, and meanness are merely repulsive. The devil taken for himself is thus a bad, aesthetically unusable figure. For he is nothing but the lie within himself and consequently a highly prosaic personality. In the same way the Furies of hate and so many later allegorical figures of a similar kind are potencies of a sort, but without affirmative subsistency and firmness [XI, p. 284f.].²⁰

Now it is true that this surprising invective refers essentially to the negative in art, to the ugliness within the beautiful "in the ideal representation of an action." But the determinations used here: "The harshness of dominion" (reminiscent of Jacob Böhme dialectic of negation), "the obduracy of superior power" reach, obviously in a philosopher of totality, far beyond the aesthetic sphere. A negative in isolation is not considered here as merely artificially isolated, it is also isolated in itself, as a dead-end or an abyss. Thus considering Mephistopheles by himself, one can say: Mephistopheles without Faust, who uses him as stimulation and as vehicle, has no place in the dialectic. Just as — to take a more recent example — the satanism of Fascism is historically worthless and will remain so. From the standpoint of the living contradiction, the revolutionary factor, nothing progressive can be derived from this bloody, fatal nihilism. It contains no accessible lever, in contrast to the other contradictions of an obsolete capitalism, although Fascism, as its crisis, is a part of late capitalism. Indeed, as Marx has it, the destructive element of the *substantial* crisis, this demonical "re-established totality" of capitalism, must be used by the proletariat actively, in order to counteract the merely destructive element so that the proletariat and the bourgeoisie do not descend into the same barbarism.

So much for the continually irksome aspect, that which calls for further work, in the dialectic. For the algebra of the revolution things must accordingly be calculated, dealt with; the negative quantities,

like the night, are not friendly to men before they have been treated by him. Left to itself it is not true that each historically appearing contradiction (to say nothing of mere differentiation or opposition) is itself impelled to progress. Even in Hegel who aspired only to witness, just as first properly in the active Marx, there is nothing unconditionally dialectical as such in every contradiction, especially not when it is thoroughly negative, as Fascism and brutalizing poverty show.

The contradiction must be seized and seized actively. This is only possible when it stands in far reaching and further reaching, deeply and more deeply interwoven material historical contexts. Indeed in the decisive case, especially in the present state of emergency, these contexts can only be traced in their full extent when the subjective contradiction takes up the objective contradiction and actively mediates itself with the objective contradiction. Only then will the contradiction which is also objective be fully activated against the petrification, this contradictory algebra of the revolution knows no contradiction of all negative forces which works itself out, as it were, by itself; here, too, it recognizes no such atomism. Instead, it sees here the remains of those fields on which no grass grows, on which even the "dung of the contradictions," the turning points to possible growth, are either difficult to see or completely invisible. This is considered as opposed to a purely panlogical idealist dialectic – all of which certainly in no way hinders the power, the celebration of negativity. On the contrary, the *destruction of the negative*, which is ramified in its reflections in itself, is decisive to the algebra of the revolution; thus, "Something is vital only to the extent that it contains the contradiction in itself, only if it is this power to hold and bear the contradiction within it" [IV, p. 69].²⁰ Thus again for the *negation of the negation*: "The resolved contradiction is . . . the essence as the unity of the positive and the negative" [VI, p. 62],²¹ which is why Hegel, despite the Thirty Years' War and his abhorrence of the cold devil, can and must prefer contradiction to any petrified identity. He tentatively holds the two apart and says: "Indeed, if we are talking about order of rank and these two determinations were to be fixed in separation then contradiction would be taken as the more profound, the more substantial" [IV, p. 68].²² It is precisely to this substantiality that Marx's dialectic of historical materialism directly relates, not to the mere unity of contradictions, to the *coincidentia oppositorum* of the dialecticians before Hegel, the maintenance of harmony within each epoch. Rather, for the materialist dialectic, history is above all a history of dissonance, not one of a unison which supposedly prevails somewhere. However,

if the world of events is to pass from mere prehistory to actual history, the factor of the revolutionary opposition — which is the dissonating force in dissonance itself — must be added to the dissonance of the world. Not simple negation, but negation of the negation makes the dialectic, according to Engels' important proposition, what it is: It is the historically productive emerging out of the “night of the negation turning into itself,” and the factor of subjective contradiction connected to the contradiction, which is breaking out, objectively completes within history as class struggle the material dialectic. This subjective negative power leads in a revolutionary manner beyond catastrophe, which can be what simple negation means; it intensifies the productive, explosive character of the objective contradictions.

Pulsebeats and syllogisms

“The best thing that children can do with their toys is to smash them.” [Enz. § 396 Addition, VII, vol. 2, p. 95.]

The distinction between understanding and reason is important in the dialectic, it is this:

Prior to Kant no distinction had been made between understanding and reason. But unless one wants to sink to the level of the vulgar consciousness which crudely obliterates the distinct forms of pure thought, the distinction between understanding and reason must be firmly established. The object of reason is that which is determined in-and-for-itself, identity of content and form, of universal and particular. Whereas for the understanding the object falls apart into the form and the content, the universal and the particular, into an empty ‘in-itself’ and a determinateness which is externally added to it. Thus, in the thinking of the understanding content is indifferent to its form while in rational or comprehending cognition the content produces its form from out of itself [Enz. VII, vol. 2, § 467, p. 355f.].

Put in another way: “Thought as understanding does not go beyond fixed determinateness and the distinction of the same things against others; it takes this kind of limited abstraction as that which exists and is for itself” [Enz. § 80, VI, p. 147]. True thought, in contrast, is the nonschematic, nonmechanical rational thought, that of the concrete content: “Speculative or positive-rational thought comprehends the unity of the determinations in their oppositions, the affir-

mative which is maintained through the dissolution and the transitions of the determinations" [Enz. § 82, VI, p. 157].

The power of thought is manifested in its inherent negative factor, in the overthrow of the old positivity which has become false, in uncovering the new reason and actuality:

As a result of further thought it became clear that precisely thereby the highest relations of life were compromised. Thought deprived the positive of its power; the constitutions of states fell sacrifice to thought. Religion was assailed by thought, fixed religious conceptions which had previously stood as revelations were undermined and the old belief was undermined in the minds of many. . . . Philosophers were banished and killed because of the overthrow of religion and state, both of which were essentially connected. And thus thought asserted itself in actuality and exercised immense effectiveness" [Enz. § Addition 3, VI, p. 33].

"The life of God and divine knowledge might be said to be love playing with itself; this idea sinks to the level of edification and insipidity if the seriousness, the pain, the patience, and work of the negation is missing" [II, p. 15].²³

J.G. Hamman, light of the storm and stress, enemy of the merely ratiocinative Enlightenment, had written: "*Optimus maximus* demands pulsebeats not syllogisms from us." Hegel wants to comprehend these as the same, falling together in the dialectical vitality of the spirit which has its syllogistic pulsebeat in thesis, antithesis (contradiction), synthesis. It should be noted here that Hegel's *Logic* distinguishes mere differentiation, and then mere opposition, from contradiction such that *differentiation* is comparatively external, the *opposition* is exhausted in the negative-positive formula and opposes itself within that, while only the *contradiction* represents the moving-moved unity of all these contrasts [IV, pp. 39–73].²⁴ At times it may appear that Hegel elevates every differentiation, in particular each opposition to the rank of objective contradiction, in the sense of a purely *idealistic* dialectic: that is, idealism which is as much imposed on the world as conceived of as continuous development within the world and in the end as a circular, stationary dialectic. This goes together with the pulsebeat, with the "*idealism of vitality*," as Hegel calls the dialectic. Thus: "Thinking reason, so to speak, sharpens the blunted distinction of differentiation, the mere diversity of imagination, into essential distinction, to opposition. The manifold entities become active and lively in relation to one another only when driven to the limit of the

contradiction and there they obtain the negativity which is the inherent pulsation of self-movement and vitality" [VI, p. 71].²⁵ It is, as Hegel intends, thinking reason in the *world*, not, or not only, that in man which drives differentiation and opposition up to the peak of contradiction as something inherent to the object itself. Everything goes under in the dialectical movement of spirit, everything is maintained in its universality and separateness. Even in being-other: "It (the concept) raises to each further stage of determination the whole mass of its antecedent content and by its dialectical progress not only loses nothing and leaves nothing behind but carries with it all that it has acquired, enriching and strengthening itself in itself" [V, p. 349]²⁶ — a stormy world memory, a cardiogram of constantly emerging spiral syllogistic architecture.

In this Hegel takes up, for the first time since Nicholas of Cusa, the idea of the function of nothingness. In Cusa nothingness appears as the *alteritas*, the otherness with which unity in all things is afflicted, which he explains by saying, "things come into existence when God unfolds himself in nothingness" [*Dedocta ignorantia* II, 3]. Diversity, disorderliness, death all belong to the original night, to the *ex nihilo*, as Augustine says, out of which the world is made. In Hegel this nothingness recurs as otherness, but as the sphere of the contradiction or difference in the middle: Being gives birth to nothingness as its negative determinateness which spirit lets work for in, and precisely in, the difference. In this way nothingness is not only hung in between thesis and synthesis but is also differently nuanced in each dialectical middle term. *The series of dialectical middle terms is Hegel's history of nothingness.* The nothingness which has become the antithesis in Hegel's pan-logical structure takes up the position of the *force factor* and seeks to replace it. That is "the enormous power of the negative," the driving force which sets dialectical development in motion and holds it there: The negative here is productive death; thus,

not the life which balks at death and keeps itself pure of devastation, rather that which endures death and maintains itself in death is the life of the spirit. It gains its truth only in that it finds itself even within absolute disruption, . . . it is this power only in that it looks the negative squarely in the face and lingers with it. This lingering is the magic power which transforms it (the negative) into being [II, p. 26].²⁷

Thus is the death celebration of nothingness affirmed; but certainly held almost completely between the positive determinations thesis and

synthesis, taken in the middle. The negative does not somehow lie as *not* at the beginning (here it is always the thesis) or threaten as *nothingness* at the end (there it is always the synthesis). It is active only in the middle, medial, as transitoriness, variety and the seriousness of war, as the night within light, so that light might not decay into the “powerless beauty” (of the unmoved logical). In this way nothingness becomes an objective Mephistopheles who agitates and creates in the world. It is an insecurity factor against “the finite determinations becoming fixed.” It is the ground of knowledge, as well as the real ground of the necessary downfall of any existing positive, and of the rational which continually turns into the irrational. In this way, nothingness in Hegel is completely harnessed to the movement of being: No *Tohuwabohu*,²⁸ rather, it is, as Hegel maintains, an automatic mainspring of vitality.

Being that turns into nothingness is “passing away,” nothingness which turns into being is “coming to be”; both, for Hegel, constitute becoming. The Phoenix, which burns itself up, is reborn and burns itself up again:

Whoever requires that nothing exists which carries a contradiction, as the identity of opposed terms, within it, requires also that nothing vital exists. For the force of life, and still more the power of the spirit consists in this: to assert the contradiction within it, to endure it and to overcome it. This affirmation and resolution which obtains between the ideal unity and the real juxtaposition of the elements constitutes the continual process of life, and life is only as *process* [X 1, p. 155].²⁹

Just how strongly the dialectical in Hegel can beat with passion is illustrated by the following stunning passage, full of the depth of experience, from the *Philosophy of Right* on the dialectic of love.

The first moment in love is that I do not wish to be an independent person for myself, and that if I were then I would feel myself to be inadequate and incomplete. The second moment is that I find myself in another person, that I matter to her, which she also achieves in me. Love is thus the greatest contradiction and the understanding cannot resolve it, because there is nothing harder than this pointedness of self-consciousness which is negated and which I should have as affirmative. Love is the generation and the resolution of the contradiction at the same time; as resolution it is ethical unity [VIII § 158, Addition, p. 222].³⁰

NOTES *

1. "The Preface to the Phenomenology," trans. Kaufmann in his *Hegel* (1965), p. 424. Also *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. Baillie (1910), p. 105.
2. See Kaufmann, op.cit., p. 414; and Baillie, op.cit., p. 98.
3. See Baillie, op.cit., p. 143.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
5. MEGA I(2) p. 215. See *Karl Marx: Early Texts*, trans. and ed. D. Mclellan (1971), p. 3; see also *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. and trans. Easton and Guddat (1967), p. 43 and W. Glen-Doepel's translation of the letter in *The Young Marx*, B. Delfgaauw (1967), p. 138, where I have "overheard," Mclellan has "studied," Glen-Doepel has "observed," and Easton and Guddat have "studied," but the verb in the original is "belauschen" which means "to eavesdrop."
6. See Kaufmann, op.cit., p. 380 and Baillie, op.cit., p. 75.
7. Bloch's quotation in the original is an error, (as Bloch affirmed in a letter to me). See "Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy," trans. E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simson (1955), vol. III, pp. 546-547.
8. See Kaufmann, op.cit., p. 380 and Baillie, op.cit., p. 75.
9. We are ignorant and we will remain ignorant.
10. See *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, trans. J. Petry (1970), vol. 2, p. 15 and vol. 1, p. 279. Also *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Miller (1970), pp. 89-90 and 80.
11. See Kaufmann, op.cit., pp. 388-390 and Baillie, op.cit., p. 81.
12. Kaufmann, *ibid.*, p. 390 and Baillie, *ibid.*, p. 81-82.
13. Kaufmann, *ibid.*, p. 424 and Baillie, *ibid.*, p. 105.
14. *Science of Logic*, trans. Johnston and Struthers (1929), vol. I, p. 141 and *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. Miller (1969), p. 129.
15. See Johnston and Struthers, *ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 147-148 and Miller, *ibid.*, p. 135. The reference in the original is an error.
16. See Baillie, op.cit., p. 808.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 808.
18. The one analogy.
19. *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. Osmaston (1920), vol. I, p. 295.
20. Johnston and Struthers, op.cit., vol. II, p. 68 and Miller, op.cit., p. 440.
21. Johnston and Struthers, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 62 and Miller, *ibid.*, p. 435.
22. Johnston and Struthers, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 67 and Miller, *ibid.*, p. 439.
23. Kaufmann, op.cit., pp. 388-390 and Baillie, op.cit., p. 81.
24. *The Logic*, Book 2, Section 1, Chapter 2, from B.2. "Differentiation" to the end of the chapter.
25. Johnston and Struthers, op.cit., vol. II, p. 69 and Miller, op.cit., p. 442.
26. Johnston and Struthers, *ibid.*, p. 482 and Miller, *ibid.*, p. 840.
27. Kaufmann, op.cit., p. 407-408 and Baillie, op.cit., p. 93.

* References in brackets following quotations from Hegel are to the *Werke* edition of 1832-1848. All of the footnotes are the translator's. In only one or two cases have existing translations been used, thus references to them are for context and comparison.

28. Gen. 1.1., formless coid, chaos.
29. See Osmaston, op.cit., vol. I, p. 166.
30. See *Philosophy of Right*, trans. Knox (Encyclopedia Brittanica edition) (1952), p. 133.